

U.S. reaches tentative OK on trade with Sovs despite Lithuania

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WASHINGTON — The United States yesterday reached a tentative agreement to normalize trade with the Soviet Union — two days after President Bush declined to impose sanctions on the Soviets for their crackdown on Lithuania.

The deal — which could give the Soviets most-favored nation status and normalize U.S.-Soviet relations for the first time in nearly 50 years — could be signed May 30 at Bush's summit with Soviet chief Mikhail Gorbachev.

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) quickly denounced the deal in view of the Lithuanian crackdown, saying: "It's a sell-out of freedom — and, to be quite candid, it's sickening."

He vowed to conduct a filibuster to block the trade deal when it comes to the Senate for approval — unless the Soviets back off on Lithuania.

D'Amato — who was turned away at the Lithuanian border by Soviet guards this month — added that the deal sends a signal that the United States feels "the people's cry for freedom in Lithuania is not legitimate."

Meanwhile, a senior official briefing reporters yesterday



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FIERY PROTEST: Moscovites watch a man writhe in pain after setting himself on fire over Soviet actions in Lithuania. The injured man reportedly had a Lithuanian passport.

said the Bush administration believes "there's no way Lithuania can get its independence except by sufferance of the Soviet Union."

He added, as an indication of what the administration regards as the tough situation Lithuania faces: "This is three

and a half million people in the arms of the Russian bear."

The official also acknowledged that Soviet law, which Gorbachev says should be the means for Lithuania to seek independence, imposes "some very high hurdles" that might prove insurmountable.